

FACT SHEET ON BLOOD LEAD SCREENING EAST CHICAGO HEALTH EXPOSURE INVESTIGATION

The Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), in cooperation with the East Chicago Health Department, are offering free voluntary blood tests for lead exposure to selected residents. In addition, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) are assisting in this effort to provide information and answer community questions regarding lead exposure.

Background

In 1985, the U.S. EPA did soil sampling in areas of East Chicago to determine lead levels present in soil. Homes near industries which emitted lead in the past were selected for sampling. The test results show high levels of lead in several homes. Historical records show the lead contamination in these homes may have come from industrial activities such as smelting of lead and other metals, steel manufacturing, and oil refining, as well as the high number of cars on the road, and use of lead-based paint in homes. U.S. EPA will continue to assess the impact of this lead on the environment.

Also in 1985, the Indiana State Board of Health (ISBH), now known as the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH), with assistance from the East Chicago Health Department (ECHD), conducted blood lead testing for children in East Chicago. During a two-day period, 53 children between the ages of six months and six years were tested. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) considers children to have an elevated level if the amount of lead in the blood is at least 10 micrograms per deciliter. Only two of the East Chicago children were found to have moderately elevated blood lead levels (between 10 and 20 micrograms per deciliter).

Based on the information collected in 1985, exposure to lead in this community did not seem to be widespread. However, it is not known whether the exposure levels of the 53 children who were tested were similar to the exposure levels of all children in the community. Therefore, the ISDH and ECHD could not draw definitive conclusions about the impact of industrial activities on children in the area.

Next are some helpful questions and answers to help you understand the health risks associated with lead exposure. In addition, information is provided regarding the free volunteer blood tests provided by ISDH in partnership with ECHD.

What is lead?

Lead occurs naturally in most soils. Low levels of lead are common in the air, water, food, soil and dusts in cities because of the widespread use of lead in man-made products. Uses of lead include batteries, solders, paints, varnishes, gasoline additives and other products. Because excess exposure to lead can threaten health, the Federal and State governments try to minimize the amount of lead in the air, water, and soil by controlling its use.

How can I be exposed to lead and what are the health effects related to lead exposure?

Exposure to lead can occur from breathing air, drinking water, and eating soil or foods that contain lead. High lead levels in the body can cause damage to the nervous system, kidneys, the digestive system and the blood-forming process. In children, lead may stunt growth, harm mental development and impair hearing.



Children are more sensitive to the effects of lead than adults because they are still growing and developing. Younger children are at special risk because they often have higher levels of exposure since they often play in

dirt and may put dirty hands in their mouths or, in some cases, eat dirt. In addition, children who lack proper nutrition may absorb more lead, and suffer more harmful effects.

What should I do to reduce my exposure to lead?

You should prevent or limit a child's exposure to contaminated soil and provide a nutritious diet. Pregnant women should seek pre-natal care to protect their developing infants.

To prevent the swallowing of contaminated soil, you can limit your child's exposure to dirt in the following ways:

- cover areas of exposed dirt with grass, flowers, mulch or concrete;
- wash down very dusty areas with a hose;
- discourage children from playing in dirt, gravel or ground covers;
- supervise young children to prevent them from eating dirt;
- provide a sand box or alternative to playing in dirt; and washing children's hands and toys taken outside frequently.

To prevent breathing in lead-contaminated dust, you should:

- place a door mat at the door;
- vacuum carpets and drapes often;
- dust with oiled cloth;
- wash floors often;
- teach children to wipe their feet before entering;
- keep windows closed as much as possible to reduce dirt in the home; and

- replace furnace filters often.

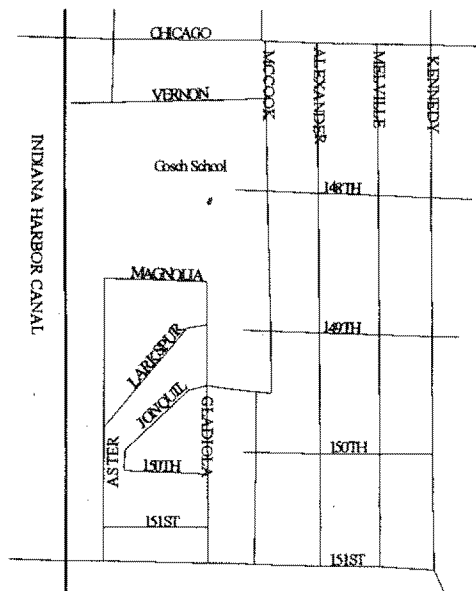
Safe habits to prevent exposure:

- practice good nutrition by maintaining a well-balanced diet which includes milk, cheese, dark green leafy vegetables, liver and spinach;
- supervise children to prevent chewing on painted window sills, woodwork or other painted areas in case lead-based paint was used;
- do not dig or turn soil on windy days; and
- use gloves while gardening; and wash/peel all home-grown fruits and vegetables.



Who can be tested and how much will it cost for testing?

A blood test will be offered to anyone living in the area shown on the map below. The age limit is 1 year and older. The blood testing is being offered by the ECHD free of charge and is completely voluntary.



When and where will the blood testing be done?

The blood testing will be at the Martin Luther King Recreation Center and the 151st Street Recreation Center. You may come to any of the blood testing sessions listed below.

LEAD SCREENING SESSIONS

Wednesday, July 23, 1997
Martin Luther King Recreation Center
10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
5:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Thursday, July 24, 1997
151st Street Recreation Center
10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
5:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

For more information, please call Tony Butler at ECHD at 391-8415.

What will the blood testing involve?

When you come to have your blood drawn, you will be required to read and sign a consent form, and asked to complete a short questionnaire. You will then go to a room where a nurse or phlebotomist (health care worker who draws blood) will take about 1/3 teaspoon of blood from a vein in your arm using a needle. This may cause a little pain, but every effort will be made to minimize the discomfort. Some people may have a small bruise where the needle enters the skin, but this will go away soon. The whole process should take only about 10-15 minutes. The blood sample will be tested by a certified laboratory and the results will be sent to the ISDH in about 6 to 8 weeks.

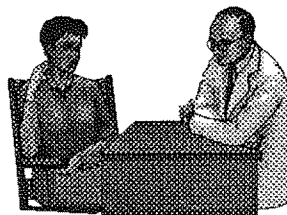
Will my name and test results be confidential?

Yes. At the time of the blood testing, all participants will be required to sign a written consent form before their blood will be drawn. Anyone under the age

of 18 will need a consent form signed by their parent or legal guardian.

What does "confidential" mean?

In this situation, confidential means that your name, address, phone number, and any other personal information you give the health department during the exposure investigation will be kept completely private, including your test results. Your test results will be mailed directly to your home address. We will not give out or use your name or any other identifying information except to provide you with your test results.



What will I learn from the test results?

You will learn from blood testing whether you have been exposed to lead. If your test results show that you have a high blood lead level, we will suggest methods to reduce your exposure. At your request, your local

physician will be provided with information on the signs and symptoms of lead exposure so that you may contact him/her for medical advice.



How can I get more information?



For information about the health investigation or exposure, contact:

Linda Hayman
Indiana State Department of Health
2 North Meridian Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204
(317) 233-7808

For general information about lead contact:

Patricia Dixon-Dalton
East Chicago Health Department
3903 Indianapolis Blvd.
East Chicago, IN 46312
(219) 391-8226

For more information contact:

Mirtha Capiro (312) 886-7567
Noemi Emeric (800) 621-8431
or (312) 886-0995
U.S. Environmental Protection
Agency - Region 5
77 West Jackson Blvd., DRE-8J
Chicago, IL 60604

Kay L. Nelson (219) 881-6712
Northwest Indiana Regional Office
Indiana Department of
Environmental Management
504 N. Broadway, Suite 418
Gary, Indiana 46402

